

FALKNER HOUSE READING

Learning to read is one of the most exciting and important skills your child will learn at school. We outline below key points that will enhance reading at home and school.

Reading scheme Reception – Year 3

Falkner House deliberately uses a variety of publishers and reading schemes, with books banded and coded according to difficulty. This allows the children to consolidate their skills at each level, using texts presented in a range of styles and with different requirements. Each child's progress is monitored and recorded in detail, and they will move up to the next level at the appropriate point in his/ her development, irrespective of year group and of how many books have been read in the current level – we never require any child to read all the books in a given band – they might move up having only read a few or all of the books. It is totally bespoke.



We take great pride in making sure that children are in the “right” reading band – assessing this is a lengthy process (circa half an hour) and it is good practice to do them at appropriate intervals i.e. when the teachers want confirmation that a child is ready to move up. The reading scheme is not a race. Children will come off the scheme at some stage – at the earliest in Year 2 and at the latest in Year 3 or 4. There can be a problem in the inherent competitiveness of parents, but there are no prizes in moving up the scheme fast! Please trust our judgement.

The Falkner House reading scheme is varied and is updated constantly with lots of fiction and non-fiction books and is an amazing resource. That said, there may be a few occasions when your son or daughter says a book is “boring” – but, it is homework, and part of school life is learning to continue to the best of our abilities what we may not wish to do! School reading books are not designed always to appear “challenging” – the aim is for your child to become a confident, fluent reader at each level.

Reading from any book is pointless unless one understands what one is reading; your child is not just reading words from a page for the sake of it! Fundamental skills are acquired through practice in the process of de-coding (understanding how the words are assembled) and, increasingly, taking in the structure of the whole sentence.

Comprehension is the key. The scheme is a tool not an objective in itself. Reading is about inference, understanding, comprehension, critical appreciation and learning. Reading with a parent or teacher for 10 or 15 minutes is not about just reading the text, it is a time when an adult can have a crucial dialogue with a child. As can be gleaned from the above, the capability of the adult concerned is key – they have to understand what they are doing and have a very good standard of English. Parents should support their child with a range of questions about the text, for example:

Literal comprehension questions – these require the children to locate or recall specific information directly stated in the text e.g. What are the two uses of the swimming pool?

Inferential comprehension questions – these require the children to draw a conclusion by combining information not directly stated in the text with some degree of prior knowledge:

Why do you think...

What is the problem...



Why did the character...
What is most likely true about...
Predict what would happen if/when...
What lesson does this text teach...
How does the author/character feel about/when...
What lesson did the character learn...
From this story, you could probably guess...
What would happen in a sequel to this story...

Why is it important to have signs about the depth of the water on the side of the swimming pool?
Why are modern tankers double skinned? Why is the word skin used in that context?

Applied knowledge questions – these require the children to explain generalisations and extend information beyond the text through personal response e.g. explain why children younger than twelve years of age are not allowed in the deep pool.

Vocabulary check – choose a word to replace from the passage? A “bolt from the blue” what does that mean? What does “fed up” mean? – how do we get to this expression? What other kinds of bolts are there (doors, horses, lightening)? Ask the child if they know another word with the same meaning. We are building a crucial understanding of nuance that will serve your child lifelong quite apart from helping towards academic success.

However, having said that reading is all about comprehension, it is still necessary for the adult to follow precisely what the child is reading. Total accuracy in this scenario is important as reading accurately out loud or to yourself is a vital skill in itself. Clearly when reading for pleasure, an adult may skim read rather than read with accuracy. Both are equally important but different skills.

When we hear children read at school, we will ask them to identify (as appropriate to their level) sight words, magic “e” words, blends, etc. We help them to become aware of implication and to make their own inferences. Illustrations are discussed before and during the reading, and stories are analysed: what has happened and what might happen next? It is important to ensure that there is involvement in the storyline. The picture is a vital part of the process and should never be covered up!

The school reading scheme books are unrelated to what your child chooses to read in his/ her free time. We applaud children of any age reading tricky, complicated chapter books if those are what are enjoyed – as ever, though the key is balance, there is generally little purpose in skipping and racing through long sophisticated stories! Equally your child may want to read newspapers, comics or the same style of books over and over. They may prefer audio books. Any of this is a wonderful and essential addition to life but quite separate from carefully reading a school reading book with an adult who is promoting and prompting all the vital skills noted above.

As a rough guide, an average child using a reading scheme book will take ten minutes to read, discuss and analyse two to three pages at home. Therefore, reading as part of homework should not be an arduous task.

Routine at school

Reading is built into the school day and from Reception up to the end of Year 3 the children are heard individually. The school reading book goes home with the child to allow him/ her to read to the parent or carer. With the shorter books the children will usually re-read all/part of the book at home. This re-reading is hugely valuable. Any child experiencing specific difficulties is given extra help and / or referred to the Head of Lower School. When children are reading to a teacher, the focus is on quality reading time. As they develop, they are heard for slightly longer.



Reception and Year 1: Each child reads to a teacher from their school reading book four or five times a week. The reading reinforces letter recognition, sound and blends, with pictures to enhance understanding.

Year 2: Each child reads to their teacher from their school reading book three times a week.

Year 3: Children gradually move off the reading scheme as appropriate. Children on the scheme read to a teacher three times a week; once off the scheme, they read to a teacher once a week from a book of their own choice.

Years 4 – 6: Children are heard regularly in a variety of reading contexts, which arise during lessons; these might be an individual or class reading of a poem, a passage from a novel or a play.

We are often asked to give ‘double books’ at the weekends with a view to moving faster through the scheme. We don’t find it helpful for the children’s progress to take this approach.

Reading record Reception – Year 3:

All school reading is recorded in the child’s reading record book, which goes between home and school. Parents / carers are encouraged to use this book to communicate any important observations or queries about home reading. The book becomes a record of progress at school and at home.

The Libraries

Children use the school libraries, which contain both fiction and non-fiction, to develop their reading range and stamina. There are also small stocks of books in the classrooms for additional borrowing.

Years 1 – 2 have daily access to the Lower School Library.

Years 3 - 6 have a weekly timetabled session in the Upper School Library. Children take out one or two books (recorded by the teacher), which can be changed during the week, as necessary. It is expected that children read at least one school library book a week



Children are not allowed to bring a Kindle into school or to take it with them on a school trip.

HOME READING

Communication

It is crucial that the school and parents work together to ensure that the development of reading skills is supported through mutual understanding and good communication. There may be occasions when a new book is sent home and it appears too difficult, or indeed too easy. Please be patient and give us your feed-back so that we can “get it right”. The whole process requires constant fine-tuning and with your help we can quickly address any problems. Remember that children are changing and developing all the time; we have no magic solutions but we do have a commitment to do our very best.

Paired reading

Reading in unison (paired reading) with your child is known to have a high success rate. It is particularly useful when you read a ‘home’ book or library book with them, or when they move to a new level of reading. Paired reading also provides a different approach that can relieve the perception of boredom from either the child or the parent!

Routine at home

All children from Reception to Year 4 are expected to read to their parents on a daily basis for 10 -15 minutes. Regular practice following the guidance within this handbook will be vital for your child’s enjoyment and progress. The best time for reading a book together or reading aloud to your child is often just before bed-time; this is not, however, the moment for structured, supervised reading.

Practical points to encourage a child to read:

- Read aloud to your child on a regular basis even after they have become a free reader.
- Children love new books and enjoy being taken to bookshops or libraries and allowed to choose.
- Audio books can be very helpful for reluctant readers and for all on long journeys. They can also be an excellent means for a child to enjoy and benefit from a more advanced book.
- *Whispersync for Voice* allows a child to switch back and forth between reading the Kindle book and listening to the audible narration (see details on Amazon website). This is more appropriate for an older child – Year 2 upwards.

The reluctant reader

Many children lose interest in reading from time to time. Please do not panic, because the surest way to exacerbate the problem is to make an issue out of it. There are many reasons why a child may be unwilling to read, ranging from a lack of confidence to tiredness. The most important first step is for you to alert your child’s teacher if you are experiencing problems at home. There are various strategies which can be used to encourage reluctant readers, but remember that children learn best when a task is enjoyable and meaningful. We can work together to achieve this.

Quantity / quality

There can be a tremendous amount of competitiveness surrounding children’s reading but excessive quantity has a negative effect on quality. Far better than rushing through a text, is for your child to read a few pages, with an adult checking their understanding of the storyline and raising awareness of, for example, sight words and blends.

Library and reading lists

Children’s reading ability and interests vary considerably and our libraries are far from definitive. Amongst many excellent new books, there are an inordinate number of ‘fantasy’ stories, many are extremely popular but often of very slight content. Historical fiction can be very appealing to children as is biography or autobiography; many children love learning about “real lives”.



“Lighter” books by authors such as Daisy Meadows or Francesca Simon are perfectly acceptable as part, but not all, of a child’s reading. Children should be encouraged to try a variety of books but never forced to finish a book that they really dislike.

The website shows the books in the Falkner House main and lower school libraries as well as books read to the children in Nursery and Reception and in the classrooms. Fiction books are in broad age bands e.g. picture books for reading to children (Early Years – Nursery and Reception), emerging readers (Reception – Year 2), upper school (Years 3 – 6 with a special transition band). The lower school library also contains a changing selection of transition books for confident readers. Some upper school library books are deemed ‘extended reading’ either in terms of vocabulary or content – parents may wish to keep a check on books in this category. Non-fiction is categorized by topic. All the books listed are available to children either in the Falkner House libraries or the classrooms and are available for parents to purchase although some may be out of print. We always are culling and restocking – we have a constant debate over the popularity of easy reads being a route to developing a love of reading versus a striving for excellence! Please let us know of any books you have discovered and would recommend us to buy.

We have now evolved ‘essential reading’ lists:

- Nursery – Year 2 books to be read to your child by the end of Year 2
- Years 1-2 books to be read by your child during Years 1 and 2
- Year 3 books to be read by your child by the end of Year 3
- Year 4 books to be read by your child by the end of Year 4
- Year 5 books to be read by your child by the end of Year 5
- Year 6 books to be read by your child by the end of Year 6

We are expecting parents to have read most of the Nursery – Year 2 ‘essential reads’ books to their child by the end of Year 2 with the same applying to children reading the books for themselves in Years 1 -6. This will be monitored in school. Your child may well be reading books recommended for older year groups; this is entirely his or her choice - the key is that they should be really enjoying their reading. The recommendations are our top picks – an eclectic selection of books that, in our opinion, all Falkner House children should have read by the time they finish Year 6! We have generally selected just one book of an author; if it appeals, then we hope your child is enticed to read more of the series. “Essential” books can be read either from the library or from home books, if the latter, then such books can be noted on the system under a child’s name. We hope that it goes without saying that the “essential” list is just a start and that all children will read voraciously and access any /all of the books in the Falkner House library.

It is impossible to be precise as to what is the “right” age range for a book for an individual child. Some children will be avid readers of books recommended for much older children whilst others are far happier and gain much more from a book that parents might consider to be “too young”. It all depends and parents need to use their judgement and be flexible. Most authors write for a fairly specific age range but others e.g. Roald Dahl, Dick King-Smith and Michael Morpugo span the ages.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING are the route to READING

The key to developing successful communication is regular ‘chatter’ with adults who speak good English. Children need to have lots and lots of opportunities to discuss all manner of things from family relationships to why a children’s cartoon has a certain ending. You can easily expand your child’s vocabulary by adding in new and ‘bigger’ words and playing word games with unusual synonyms. For instance, ‘that giant is huge / enormous / gigantic/ humungous’. If your son or daughter gets the sentence structure wrong when in conversation with you, simply repeat it back to them correctly. Pupils who speak another language at home tend to do very well indeed at Falkner House but if they say a certain sound “incorrectly” then they are likely to write that sound incorrectly – for instance saying ‘den’ instead of ‘then’. Again, don’t say that this is wrong, merely repeat the word correctly. Children need to have lots of opportunities to converse and should be encouraged to ask meaningful questions. Children who enjoy analysing and questioning are good learners!

PARENTAL QUALITY CONTROL

We would strongly recommend that parents keep a close eye on what their child is reading. This particularly applies to Kindle home purchases when it is all too easy to click and buy. Most children at junior school are too young to appreciate or gain from the adult classics such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen or Emily Bronte and future enjoyment can often be spoilt by too early an introduction to their works. Perhaps more important is to avoid current “sensations” such as *Game of Thrones* or indeed anything with a definite adult flavour in terms of subject matter or vocabulary: it is surely essential that children are allowed to be children. Furthermore, your child will genuinely gain far more intellectually from something ‘childish’ than from reading overly mature content. It is interesting to note that all of the children – even in Year 6 – relish the Usbourne Young Reading series.

Finally...each child is an individual with their own strengths and weaknesses. Avoid comparisons, which are not helpful, but do praise – frequently! Learning to read is a highly complex task and progress at every stage should be acknowledged and valued.

Film, TV and Audio Books

Some suggested films and TV adaptations of favourite books (we realise some of these are very old-fashioned but they are tried and tested and very popular!). They can also be an excellent “way in” to books that can seem too tricky. Many of these titles are also available as Audio Books – another wonderful way to access some of the classics.

Brambly Hedge	Anne of Green Gables	Swallows and Amazons
Peter Rabbit (TV not film)	My Friend Flicka	Treasure Island
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	White Fang	Wolves of Willoughby Chase
Babe	National Velvet	The Secret Garden
Dr Doolittle	Just William	Ballet Shoes
Heidi	The Sound of Music	Tom’s Midnight Garden
Paddington	Peter Pan	5 Children and It
Little Women	The Wizard of Oz	Bedknobs and Broomsticks
Charlotte’s Web	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Swiss Family Robinson
Alice in Wonderland	A Little Princess	Good Night Mr Tom
Black Beauty	The Borrowers	Anne of Green Gables
Flambards	Oliver	The Railway Children
National Velvet	Carrie’s War	The Polar Express
Wind in the Willows	Swallows and Amazons	Mrs Doubtfire
Famous Five	Matilda	The BFG
Lassie	Nanny McPhee	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
The Incredible Journey (Homeward Bound)	The Secret Garden	

